

Books



Joseph Figoni Le Grand Couturier de la Carrosserie Automobile. Catalogue Raisonné Vol 1: Alfa-Romeo. Peter M Larsen and Ben Erickson; Moteurs! Single volume in slipcase £195/€225. ISBN: 9788797288207.

436 pages, 444 photographs....and 28 cars. These bald statistics give some idea of the scale of the long awaited first volume on the oeuvre of Joseph Figoni from Peter Larsen and Ben Erickson, authors of *Talbot-Lago Grand Sport*, *Jacques Saoutchik* and *The Kellner Affair*. Revered and reviled in equal measure for elegance and excess, Figoni's daring and innovative designs for voluptuous, organic bodywork have galvanised opinion since the 1930s and yet have rarely featured on the bookshelves devoted to French *carrossiers*. Now, with full access to the Figoni archive, Larsen and Erickson have risen to the challenge of documenting the company's output – hugely influential, yet totalling fewer than 800 cars – with the ambitious aim of creating a multi-volume catalogue raisonné, marque by marque, from the company's foundation in 1923 to its last appearance at the Paris Salon in 1954, and embedding this within surrounding chapters setting Figoni's activities within a broader context.

This first volume, dedicated to Alfa-Romeo (note the French spelling adopted by the authors), starts with an analysis and explanation of Figoni's production and work records and then sets the scene through introductory chapters which cover the development of Alfa-Romeo's French activities and explain the significant roles that the legendary wheeler-dealer Luigi Chinetti and the celebrated Le Mans winner Raymond Sommer played in laying the foundations of Figoni's future fame. Anyone familiar with *Talbot-Lago Grand Sport* will be unsurprised by the forensic detail with which the authors describe the 28 stylish bodies – nine 6C1750s, five 6C2300s and fourteen fabulous 8C2300s – that emerged from the *atelier* on rue Lemoine, destined for both race and road. Almost 200 pages are devoted to documenting the cars chassis by chassis, the history of each painstakingly described and supported by extracts from the Figoni ledgers, press cuttings, contemporary illustrations and a multitude of photographs known and unknown, ancient and modern.

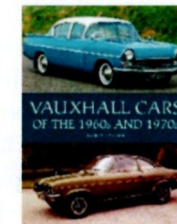
Much of the information is new and, even when there is inevitable overlap with Simon Moore's *The Legendary 2.3* in the 8C2300 chapters, the current work concentrates on the coachwork of each chassis rather than repeating the history and technical descriptions ably covered by Moore, though the opportunity is taken to include the most recent research on the often complex stories of individual chassis. The book is rounded off by comprehensive appendices covering Figoni's Alfa-Romeo production, a valuable dissertation on and listing of French *concours d'élégance* and Alfa-Romeos bodied by other French coachbuilders, and by a comprehensive bibliography and no fewer than four indices. Published under the authors' own imprint, *Joseph Figoni* has been designed and produced to exceptional standards which raise the bar significantly for future automotive self-publishers. Further volumes are scheduled to appear

from 2022 onwards, dedicated to Bugatti, Delage, Delahaye, Talbot Lago, an A-Z of other marques bodied by Figoni and finally a biography of the man and his times. The complete set will unquestionably become the most detailed record ever compiled of any coachbuilder's output and will set the benchmark for future coachbuilding histories. This book is scheduled for publication in mid-July in an edition of 600 copies, the majority of which have been allocated to pre-orders.

NJH Smith

Vauxhall Cars of the 1960s and 1970s. James Taylor. The Crowood Press, pp176 hardback. £29.95 ISBN 9781785008108

This book's title may be a little misleading in that the period covered runs from 1957, during which the Victor F-Type was launched in February, followed by the Velox and Cresta PA models that October. The production of the 1951-57 E-Series cars carried on alongside the new Victor until October, and indeed included a cosmetic facelift with a one year only grille design for 1957. Also the more developed and powerful 2,262cc engine was used in this final iteration of the E-Series, ready for its intended home in the new PA. E-Series cars are not however featured in this book.



The end of the author's chosen period ending c.1979 coincides, doubtless intentionally, with the decline of Vauxhall's autonomy in design and forced capitulation to Opel, said period having begun with Luton's first post-war implementation of a two-bodyshell range with unmistakable transatlantic styling excess, in 1957. As the author indicates, the process of "Europeanisation" of Vauxhall became complete with the introduction of the Vauxhall Cavalier and the cessation of Viva HC and Chevette production in Britain. James Taylor has undoubtedly chosen a seminal period for Vauxhall of Luton. There is no doubt that the author is commendably thorough and detailed in this work. Early in the book there appears an excellent and highly detailed account of Vauxhall design and management going right through the General Motors years, i.e. from 1925 to the end of the book's period of coverage.

The book is copiously illustrated with many factory shots and charming, not to say informative for historians and restorers, advertisements for the products of Luton. Mechanical features and their development during the period covered are not overlooked either. There is a whole chapter at the end dedicated to the engines powering these cars, confirming how strong Vauxhall and their Bedford subsidiary were in this period. Their pushrod fours and sixes were totally vice-free and long-lasting, with the Victor FD's belt-driven single overhead camshaft unit additionally being the first of its type in a production British car at its launch in October 1967. Good engineering did counter the distinctly dodgy reputation for rusting with which some of the cars were saddled! To be fair, this only applied really strongly to the 1957-59 Victor F-Types and PA six-cylinder cars, before Luton hastily and quietly fitted key underbody shielding to these models. This well-researched and comprehensive tome is heartily recommended.